

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:
THE U.S. ROLE IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

by

Chaplain (LTC) Rob Noland
United States Army Reserve

Colonel Matthew Brown
Project Adviser

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: The U.S. National Security Strategy: the U.S. Role In the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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The Israel-Palestinian conflict and its affects on U.S. strategy in the Middle East is discussed. A look at the historical aspect of the conflict, what has been the historical positions of the U.S. in relationship to the conflict, what is the U.S. current position in relationship to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and how has that position effected our National Security Strategy. Recommendations will be made on how the U.S. should involve itself in the conflict.

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THE U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: THE U.S. ROLE IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

On Feb 8, 2005 the two leaders of Israel and the Palestinian people declared there would be a stop to all military and violent activity between them.

We have agreed on halting all violent actions against Palestinians and Israelis wherever they are” declared Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

A similar pledge was made by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Today, in my meeting with chairman Abbas, we agreed that all Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere, and, at the same time, Israel will cease all its military activity against all Palestinians everywhere²

What has been the journey to get to this point in 2005? “It has been said that the Israel-Palestine conflict in the Middle East is essentially a struggle over land, that religious differences are not the cause of the conflict.”³ While in the strictest sense of the conflict this may be true, we should not discount the strong religious overtones or underpinnings that are also at the core of the conflict. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the biblical and historical elements of the current conflict, show how the conflict originated, and to examine the U.S. policy in relationship to this conflict.

The territory called Israel and Palestine is approximately 10,000 square miles of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. During its long history, the area, population, and ownership have varied greatly. Today, Israel formally occupies all the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, bounded by Egypt in the south, Lebanon in the north, and Jordan in the East. The recognized borders of Israel constitute about 78% of the land. The remainder is divided between land occupied by Israel since the 1967 six-day war and the autonomous regions under the control of the Palestinian autonomy. The Gaza strip occupies an additional 141 square miles south of Israel along the sea coast, and is mostly under the control of the Palestinian authority with small areas occupied by Israeli settlements.

BIBLICAL ROOTS

From here we need to go back many years, to a date that is really unknown, but which is recorded for us in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had not born Abraham any children and was very concerned, so she offered to Abraham a maid servant of hers named Hagar. Abraham slept with Hagar and as a result a male child was born, Ishmael. Abraham asked of the Lord that his son Ishmael might enjoy God’s blessings. It is said that God heard Abraham’s request and said

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.(Genesis 17:20)⁴

But soon Sarah would become pregnant herself and bear a male child of Abraham also, whom they would name Isaac. God would tell Abraham

Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring [Or seed] will be reckoned (Genesis 21:12)⁵.

Isaac would be the lineage that would become the Jewish nation and people of Israel, while Ishmael would be the lineage of the Palestinian people; both historically tied to Abraham and both tied to the land of their forefather. With this foundation both nations were birthed with the same heritage. Over the ensuing years the Jewish nation would grow strong and prosper and then be defeated and its people dispersed throughout the world while the lineage of Ishmael, the Palestinians, mostly nomadic throughout history, would see nations and rulers come and go over history, but always be inhabitants of the land. The Jews would face persecutions in many of the places they lived and would always long for their own home land again.

In the 19th Century...people around the world began to identify themselves as nations and to demand national rights, foremost the right to self-rule of their own. Jews and Palestinians both began to develop a national consciousness, and mobilized to achieve national goals. Because Jews were spread across the world (in diaspora), their national movement, Zionism, entailed the identification of a place where Jews could come together through the process of immigration and settlement. Palestine seemed the logical and optimal place, since it was the sight of the Jewish Origin...⁶

The Jewish claim to the land that now includes present day Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are based upon the biblical promise to Abraham and his descendants and on the fact that this was the historical Jewish kingdom of Israel. Beginning in 1882, the first wave of European Jewish immigration to Palestine began. The problem was the Palestinian Arabs had lived on the land continuously for hundreds of years, and they too, as descendants of Abraham, had a legitimate claim to the land. God's promise, they believed, included them also. It was possible that they may have felt sorry for the Jews plight in Europe, but they did not believe that they should forfeit their land for the Jews.

Our position is so simple and natural that we are amazed it should even be questioned. It is exactly the same position you in America take in regard to the unhappy European Jews. You are sorry for them, but you do not want them in your country. We do not want them in ours, either. Not because they are Jews, but because they are foreigners. We would not want hundreds of thousands of foreigners in our country, be they Englishmen or Norwegians or Brazilians or whatever. ⁷

Therefore, I feel the current state of the conflict between the Jewish nation of Israel and the Palestinians is over land within the region, but the roots of such conflict go back centuries and are at the very core of a strong religious background.

CREATION OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Having looked at some of the historical religious background of the conflict I will discuss the more modern creation of the nation of Israel. It is here that the seeds were sown for the current day problems and the U.S. involvement. Before 1948, this land, that both the Jews and the Palestinians claim, was known as Palestine. However, following the war of 1948-49 the land was divided into three parts: the state of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The drawing of the lines and the division of the land was a decision of the United Nations (U.N.). Originally it was to be divided into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab. But the Palestinian Arabs and surrounding Arab states rejected the plan. War broke out, and in 1949, Israeli forces gained significant control of lands and an armistice was signed which established the borders in accordance with the UN decision. Peace has never settled long on the lands and there have been constant disputes over who governs and controls what parts. Israel annexed much of the lands of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, via armed conflict, but also returned many portions. For many years the city of Jerusalem was divided, with the most holy Jewish sights in what was Arab controlled territory. Since 1967 Jerusalem has been under Israeli control. Israel has used its control over much of the land to build settlements and encourage its citizens to move into and occupy the territory. Since the 1949 solution never designated much of these lands as part of any sovereign state, Israel feels they are the legal administrators of the territory whose status is yet to be determined.



FIGURE 1

U.S./ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

The special relationship between Israel and the United States did not suddenly occur.

Only very slowly did the special relationship between Israel and the United States evolve. Over a period of time, this has come to rest on deep-seated factors,

including historical memory, Judeo-Christian values, the Holocaust, societal ties, strategic interest and the tenacity of Israel.⁸

As early as June 1945, and in direct defiance of the British White Paper of May 1939, which limited Jewish immigration into the region to a total of no more than 75,000 over five years and then after that only as agreed to by the Arabs, President Truman adopted a proposal which recommended that 100,000 European Jews be admitted immediately. He was warned by the British that this would anger the Arabs in the region, but signed the proposal anyway. Then in May of 1948, President Truman was encouraged by his advisors to immediately recognize the Jewish state of Israel. Only minutes after the announcement of the existence of Israel as a Nation, on May 14, 1948, the United States recognized the new nation of Israel. In the eyes of the Arab world it was obvious that the United States was pro-Israel. It is this perception, fostered by the United States' actions, that has made it very difficult for the United States to act as a legitimate arbitrator of a solution. The Arab world and the Palestinian people have a huge distrust of the United States, believing they only seek to promote Israeli dominance of the region.

However, the United States was at first very slow to provide any military assistance or economic aid to the new nation. The Second World War was just over and the United States attention was on the Soviet Union, a rising world power. At first our continued policy in Europe kept our focus off most of the problems in the Middle East. We did not want to be entangled with issues outside of those that directly related to our fear and watch of the Soviet Union. The new state of Israel and its problems were not of much concern to the United States. When Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt in October of 1956 the United States did not side with Israel, but put great pressure on them to withdraw their troops from the region. Threats of reduced or even no aid were used to influence Israel's pull out. Throughout the 1950's and into the mid-1960's aid levels to Israel remained very low. In 1967, financial aid to Israel amounted to only \$13 million, but that soon changed. Following the Six Day War in 1968, the United States provided



FIGURE 2.

\$76 million in aid; it increased to over \$600 million by 1971. Since WWII, aid to Israel has increased dramatically. In 2001 there was apportioned \$2.82 billion in economic and military foreign aid to Israel, an additional \$60 million in what is referred to as refugee resettlement and \$250 million in the Department of Defense budget, additionally there was \$85 million called imputed interest, all of this totaling \$3.125 billion.

Unquestionably, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. aid since World War II. Estimates for total U.S. aid to Israel vary, however, because of the uncertainties and ambiguities described above. An Oct. 27, 2000 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, using available and verifiable numbers, gives cumulative aid to Israel from 1949 through FY 2000 (which ended Sept. 30, 2000) at \$81.38 billion. On the other hand, last year the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* estimated total aid to Israel through FY 2000 at \$91.82 billion.⁹

If we look at the amount of aid given to other Middle East countries we can see the great gulf that exist and why many of these nations feel that our only true concern in the region is with Israel. Excluding Egypt, we give annually approximately \$225 million to Jordan, \$35 million to Lebanon, and approximately \$100 million to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Since the death of Arafat in 2004, there has been discussions by President George W. Bush that aid to the PA might be increased significantly if there is movement toward a lasting peace settlement. Egypt has become a strong ally in the region and receives an annual aid package of \$2 billion. Still, with this high aid package to Egypt, the difference between aid to Israel and other Middle Eastern nations is significant and if we just look at aid between Israel and the PA then it is staggering.

It was in 1958 under the Eisenhower administration that a subtle shift in U.S. policy toward Israel began to take shape. Factors in the Middle East began to cause recognition that Israel could be a strategic asset to our government. In the past we had looked upon them as a burden, but now the U.S. was beginning to see Israel may be a strong ally in the region.

With many nations in the region shifting to an anti-American position it became clear to the U.S. that Israel and its key location in the Middle East must become a strong ally of the United States. In 1962 during the Kennedy administration and with the sale of arms to Israel, (which was believed to be a democratic move to secure the Jewish vote in certain key states), the subtle shift that began under Eisenhower was now evident for all to see. Israel would grow in importance to the United States. There would be ups and downs in our policy toward Israel, but from this point forward Israel would become the sole pro-Western ally and power in the region. It is true that:

U.S. policy decisions with respect to Israel have, in the main, been made by presidents and presidential foreign policy elites both by themselves and for reasons entirely their own. When the U.S. did not see Israel supporting U.S. interests in stemming the expansion of Soviet influence, it did not help Israel. When U.S. leaders decided that Israel could be an asset in the U.S. struggle with the radical Arabs who were perceived as Soviet clients, it helped Israel.¹⁰

On November 30 1981, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on strategic cooperation with the state of Israel. The MOU stated,

The main objective was to deter Soviet threats in the Middle East. There would be joint military exercises, land, sea, and air; there would also be planning for the establishment and maintenance of joint readiness activities. Joint working teams will deal with specific military issues.¹¹

Throughout the Cold War Israel was always a secondary area of interest for the United States. No matter how strong an ally they were, the U.S. main focus and concern remained with Europe and Russia. With the collapse of Communism and the break up of the Soviet Republics, suddenly the U.S. interest in the Middle East became more important. For the United States, it was clear that a stable Middle East was of vital national interest. Until the 1960s, Britain was the dominant Western power in the Middle East with the U.S. focusing on the Soviet Union and Europe, but today the Middle East has become the center of attention for the U.S. and the U.S. National Security Strategy.

A SHIFT IN POLICY

The United States is now more active in their role in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. In August of 1991 President George H.W. Bush states in the U.S. National Security Strategy,

The reversal of Iraq's aggression against Kuwait was a watershed event. Nonetheless, our basic policy toward the region shows powerful continuity. American strategic concerns still include promoting stability and the security of our friends, maintaining a free flow of oil, curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, discouraging destabilizing conventional arms sales, countering terrorism and encouraging a peace process that brings about reconciliation between Israel and the Arab states as well as between Palestinians and Israel in a manner consonant with our enduring commitment to Israel's security.¹²

The American-Israel policy is shaped by many factors: historic, moral, ethnic, strategic, political, and institutional.

The relationship between the United States and Israel is strategic in the term's true sense. It transcends shared military interest.... The two countries' essential bonds are philosophical commonly held convictions about the worth and rights of

individual human beings, the ideas on which our respective democratic political institutions stand.¹³

We are committed to Israel, to peace between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs, how much support we bring to the process has varied but our commitment has remained strong. Again in the 1996 National Security Strategy of the United States it states, "The United States has enduring interests in the Middle East, especially in pursuing a lasting and comprehensive Middle East peace, assuring the security of Israel."¹⁴

While the interest of the U.S. in the security of Israel has become an important part of its National Security Strategy, there have been subtle changes in the way the U.S. seeks to achieve that end. If in the concept of Ends, Ways, and Means we accept that security of Israel, its right to exist as a state, is our End, then that End has not changed since 1948. But what is our End for the Middle East? I believe our Middle East End is an economic viable and stable region. A peaceful and successful solution of the Israeli/Palestine conflict contributes to that End. When we look at the Ways and Means then we can see some changes in how the U.S. approaches the conflict in the region and how it has chosen to influence the players. As mentioned earlier, for many years the United States did little to support Israel or provide resources, but as the U.S. interest in the Middle East grew, their interest in a strong, secure Israel also grew. The U.S. began to provide more military and economic resources to aid Israel in its on going conflict with Palestinian Arabs, while at the same time trying to bring the players in the conflict together to negotiate a settlement agreeable to both parties. Since President George W. Bush came to office, there has been a more purposeful shift to support the creation of a Palestinian state as a way to bring stability to the region and to insure Israel's security. I believe the reason for this change is the understanding that the U.S. needs to show the Arab world that we are not just interested in the security and freedom of Israel, but also in the freedom and security of all nations that respect human rights and the democratic process.

A NEW VISION

On June 24, 2002 President George W. Bush laid out a vision for a peaceful future between Israel and the Arab states which focused on a creation of a Palestinian state in three years. This new vision called on Israel to take measures that would encourage the creation of such a state, but only after the Palestinians replaced Yasser Arafat as their leader. The plan also calls for the surrounding Arab states to support and encourage such actions by both parties that would facilitate a move to the creation of a Palestinian State and recognition of Israel's right

to exist. President Bush stated that a Palestinian State would never be created by terror and further stated;

The U.S. will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorist... If Palestinians embrace democracy, confront corruption and firmly reject terror, they can count on American support for the creation of provisional state of Palestine.¹⁵

According to the New York Times and the Washington Post, President Bush's announcement that a Palestinian state was part of the U.S. vision for the Middle East as long as the right of Israel to exist is respected, was the first time a Republican U.S. President had acknowledge the need for Palestinian statehood. This is a shift in the U.S. foreign policy for this region. The U.S. policy has always sought ways to bring stability to the region and to insure Israel's security, but the policy has not strongly supported a Palestinian State. Just recently, our foreign policy has offered financial aid to the Palestinians in return for a significant move to embrace the democratic formation of a Palestinian state, cooperative support of a lasting peace with the recognition of Israel, and a cooperative effort to eliminate terrorist and terrorist activities from the region.

While this perceived new change in foreign policy appears impressive there are many who have their doubts about its success or the sincerity of the words.

There have been three strands to the US policy in the Middle East: one is the removal of any viable external military opposition to Israeli expansionism, the second, neutralizing a viable Palestinian independence movement and third, making the Middle East safe for US corporations. The three strands are intertwined and herein lies its weakness because it's based on a lot of assumptions about causes and solutions. In addition, there is the perception which has been created by the US propaganda war, that it wishes to see the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. How can it fulfill its obligations to Israel and at the same time fulfill its publicly stated support for some kind of Palestinian state.¹⁶

If you look at the current proposed peace plan, you would see there are many basic elements that have repeatedly been stated as unacceptable by the Palestinians. Currently, or prior to the death of Arafat, there appears to be at least four fundamental obstacles that make the objective of a Palestinian state unlikely to occur. First, the Palestinians have always requested a right of return for all Palestinian refugees, which Israel has consistently resisted for fear that in a number of years with birth rates the Arab Palestinians would soon out number Jews in Israel. Second, the removal of settlements is only to go back to those established since 2000. Third, the Israelis do not want to lose 12% of the land on the West Bank. Finally, the Palestinians have always demanded that Jerusalem be the capital of any future Palestinian

State. When you look at these obstacles, understanding the sentiments, cultures, religions and history of the region, it appears that possibilities for a settlement are still far in the future.

One obstacle, not mentioned but very much in play, was the Yassir Arafat. It has been a long term desire of the United States that Arafat step aside and let a more moderate leader assume the leadership role. Israel believes that Arafat's leadership was well aware of and often sponsored much of the violence and terrorism directed towards them and that no Palestinian agreement could be trusted while Arafat was still in charge. With the death of Arafat, there may be a chance for some real progress to be made. "Mr. Arafat's death does not remove the last obstacle to negotiations with Israel; but it does remove one obstacle."¹⁷ Can peace be reached now under new Palestinian leadership? There is still another often unmentioned crucial problem, and until it is resolved there appears to be no hope for peace.

The demand for a Palestinian state is accepted by most people, including most Israelis, as a reasonable one. There is, however, a serious question—is their objective a Palestinian state alongside Israel or in place of Israel? In other words is the issue the size of Israel, or the existence of Israel?¹⁸

There has been since the creation of the State of Israel a strong Arab movement for the elimination of Israel entirely. The United States, Israel, and Palestine must deal with this issue. There must be a way to assure the Israel State that a move to the creation of a Palestinian State is not just one step closer to a move of eliminating Israel completely. The former Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati, now a top advisor to Iran's supreme leader as recent as November 10, 2003 stated, "The mere existence of Israel is contrary to Tehran's national interest."¹⁹

If, on the other hand, the issue is the size of Israel, ... then it becomes what one might call by comparison a straightforward frontier question..... neither simple nor easy, but manageable and in time solvable, with the right dose of realism on both sides. For the moment, however, the clear message from the Palestinian camp and from many of their Arab and other supporters is that the issue is legitimacy, that is to say the existence, of Israel as a Jewish state. As long as this remains so, the struggle can only end when the Arabs either achieve or relinquish their purpose. Neither seems very likely at the present time.²⁰

It is evident from the information that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict begins with the formation of the nation of Israel by the U.N. in 1948. Until that time the area of Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire or under British Mandate. With the resolution by the U.N. that two states, one state of Israel and another state of Palestinian Arabs, were to be formed, a resolution that was unacceptable for the Palestinians, we have the beginning of what has been a continual state of unrest and hostility. Evidence shows that this unrest, while beginning on this date, finds its roots in Biblical history. This conflict is not just about land, it is also about what

religion will be predominant in the land. It is important that congressional leaders in the United States understand the history and culture they are dealing with when trying to aid in the peace process for the region. Without a full understanding of such history and the effects it has on the current situation in the region it will be difficult to achieve peace.

ALTERNATIVES

A variety of alternatives are available to the United States; which alternative it chooses can affect the climate of the Middle East for many years.

- First, it could continue with past United States policy toward the region that looks at a Palestinian State as an issue to be discussed and handled solely by the leaders of Israel. The U.S would interfere in the affairs of the two parties only if a crisis would arise that would threaten the sovereignty of the Nation of Israel or the stability of the larger region of the Middle East. This option requires continued diplomatic and military ties and support to Israel along with increased diplomatic contacts with Palestinian leaders to assure them that the United States is supportive of a peaceful solution to the conflict and is ready to provide aid to Palestinians upon achieving a solution to the conflict. This option runs the risk of alienating the Palestinian leaders as they perceive the United States is not using its power and influence toward the nation of Israel in bringing about a solution.
- Second, the United States could become involved in the peace process by encouraging and hosting, if necessary, discussions between the government of Israel and the Palestinian leaders. This option requires the use of the United States diplomatic and economic influencers to pressure both parties to come together to seek a lasting solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict. The United States must not be afraid to put political and economic pressure on either party in order to force them to negotiate a settlement. The risk to this option is that it endangers the strong ties the United States has with Israel while also further causing distrust by Palestinian leaders.
- Third, the United States recognizes the conflict between Israel and Palestinian leaders is a conflict that must be resolved between the parties involved; they continue the policy of allowing the parties to work out their own solutions while at the same time taking a more open and vocal stance on the benefits of the creation of a Palestinian State. Encourage both parties to move to this solution with the promise of diplomatic recognition and aid to a newly formed, democratic, state of Palestine while assuring

Israel that the United States is strongly committed to an independent and secure Israel. This option has the advantage of not bringing the United States directly into the conflict and maintaining the status quo of an interested bystander. At the same time it holds out promise of Palestinian support, increasing the opportunities for diplomatic discussion with Palestinian leaders on future opportunities of aid available to them once a democratic Palestinian state has been formed. This option runs lesser risk than option two while at the same time shows the world that the United States is supportive of a Palestinian State existing next to a strong Israeli ally.

The United States must focus its efforts on reaching out to both parties involved with a compassionate and educated understanding of their historical differences and conflict. While the United States policy has always been pro-Israel in its approach to the conflict, it must reach out to the Palestinian Arabs and show that the U.S. policy is pro-peace, pro-stability, pro-Palestinian State and pro-better life for all in the region. The U.S. cannot assist in ending hostilities in the region with an iron fist or an exclusively pro-Israel approach. We must be willing to listen to both sides, understand both sides, and be willing to support both Israel and Palestine toward a peaceful solution, within acceptable conditions that do guarantee a secure and terrorist free Israel.

WORD COUNT = 4865

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